

'HOPE'

An Anthology of literary pieces



LITUMINATI

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A Unit of weekendr innovation labs pvt. ltd.

Hope

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Preface

Empower and Enable are the two most important words that are going to mould the future of the world and every individual.

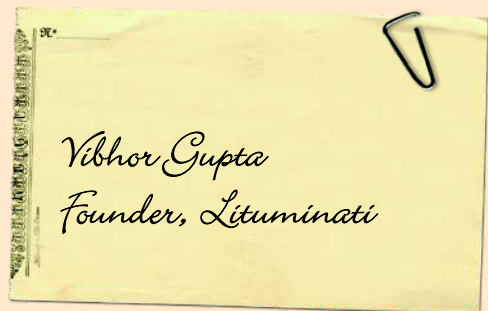
The essence of these two words ushered the way for the birth of Lituminati. As the name is structured by combining 'Literature' with 'illuminati' (the speculated secretive groups of enlightened masterminds), Lituminati would mean - a group of literary stalwarts leading a literary revolution aimed at empowering and enabling.

Lituminati extends a call to every individual to write on diverse themes. Lituminati treats these as a project and publishes these in an anthology, periodically. It aims to enable a budding author by giving him/her a platform to share his/her unheard voice or a thought that he/she feels a need to share with the outside world.

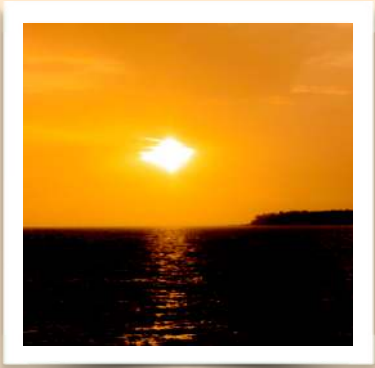
Taking the initiative global, we at Lituminati have selected platforms like the Mobile playstore(s) apart from the good old print as our medium of publishing.

Our first anthology based on the theme 'Hope' explores the myriad dimensions of one of the most powerful words that define our existence. This anthology features authors spanning five countries and four continents.

We at Lituminati wish that our readers will enjoy this collection of voices, thoughts and colours of Hope shared from across the globe.

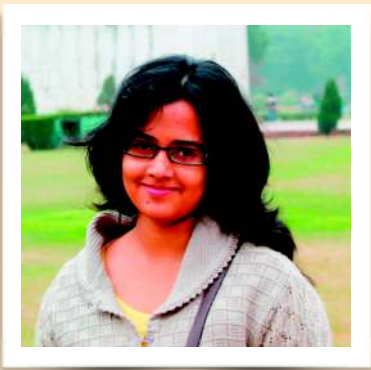






Hope is such a mystifying thing,
It is either there too strong,
Or not there at all.

Trivarna Hariharan
India



Hope – the light at the end of the tunnel, the silver lining on every cloud, the windows that opened when the door closed and every next step that the donkey took to 'shake it off and step up' and come out of the well. Hope is the fire that keeps us going. Hope is the last leaf on the tree in the story "The Last Leaf" by O. Henry. Hope is when the drug lord leaves the knife planted in the cop's thigh, close enough for her to pull it out with her mouth and cut the ropes

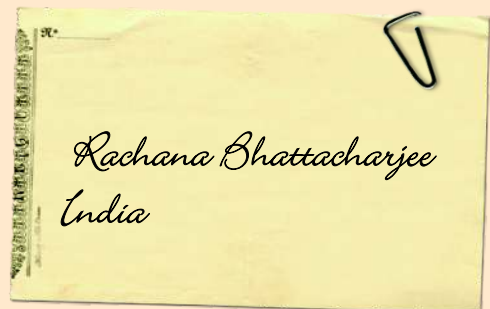
that bind her hands to a chair. Hope is the prayer of each student sitting in class with a face expectant of the teacher's absence. Hope is what keeps us alive.

Hope keeps us alive. But what keeps hope alive? We keep going; trying to do everything we can to achieve our goal. If everything on the way went wrong, we'd lose hope. All the tiny good things, the tiny things that tell us that the silver lining is indeed there, keep the fire burning. Hope is what gives us the will to go on.

But where does that hope come from? We do things with a purpose. We wish to get something for having done a thing. More often than not, what we can get at best falls short of our expectations. These utopian images in our minds become the reason for our disappointment when we reach the end of each enterprise. We always run after perfection; that unblemished destination that will give us absolute satisfaction. But we never reach there. All the time we hope to get there and each time we stop short. Every time we conjure a bubble of dreams around us that inevitably pops. It is as though we are all tied to a chain that allows us to only just reach for the happiness that waits for us beyond the walls of reality – a chain we constantly attempt to break. Had we not been hankering after this extreme desire to ultimate satisfaction, peace, justice, goodness and bliss, there wouldn't have been a place for hope in our hearts. It is basic humanness to hope for something, to live for a purpose. Even Buddha, who preached a life devoid of desires in order to be completely happy and satisfied, had hopes of teaching all people to follow his principles.

Our desire to break free of that invisible and unbreakable chain fuels our hope. Our hopes fuel our grit to go on in life. Our desires keep our hopes alive and our hopes keep us alive. No matter how deep the dejection, there is always a feeling that something good is waiting ahead. That tiny pint of positivity at the back of our heads is HOPE.

The hope to be the know-it-all keeps the physicists going. The hope to be the name-known-by-all keeps most of the others going. And the hope to help their families become a success keeps the rest going. Hope is the spell that makes the world magical.





A ray of light
Hidden in the womb of darkness,
A faint murmur
Heard in loud screams of inner voice,
A flickering flame
Braving the storm winds.

To that little girl
On the road,
Dancing to the tunes of misery's
drum,
Shivering smile, tattered clothes,

sore feet,
But she's still alive.
Hope is the most addictive drug.

To that young man,
Burdened by self doubt,
Never had any one to pour
His heart out.
Looks at the world with searching eyes.
Hope is Love.

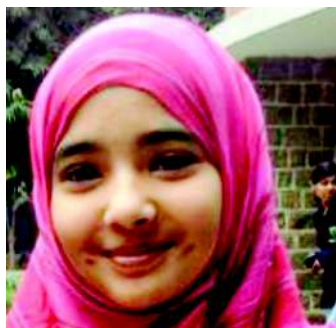
To that woman
Who lost every loved one,
Never could recover from horrors
Of death and life for her
Meant writing what she could not speak.
Hope is Virginia Woolf.

To that mother
Who lost her son in war,
Her lips lost in constant prayer,
Fights for justice, to honour his son,
With emotions over flowing her swollen eyes.
Hope is Faith.

Hope is magic, a fire,
Hidden to worldly eyes, in depths of heart,
Light it inside and
It will scare the dark.
You let it burn and it grows like weed,
Don't let it cool, it is all you need.

If you believe it, miracles will surround you.
If you believe it, miracle will be You.





Hope is in an uneventful afternoon,
in lazy spring days,
in peace,
in every bomb that doesn't explode.

The wooden chair creaked under her weight as she sat down. In front of her, waves lapped the beach bringing with them sea shells and other delightful treasures. She reminisced how as a child she used to run barefoot on the warm sand collecting sea shells; make giant soap bubbles and watch them

float to infinity. The beach was nearly empty today. A little girl splashed in water while her parents watched guardedly. A giant wave crashed into the girl who fell but then broke out in a fit of laughter.

Hope is in the giggle of a child,
in the dimples of haggard faces,
in shared sunsets,
in every stolen moment of bliss.

She watched as the family made its way back to the parking lot. The weather was beautiful. The sky was a perfect blue without a speck of clouds. A perfect day. An envelope lay on the table next to her. Already knowing what it contained she slit it open.

Dear Ms... We are sorry to inform you that your services would no longer be required...

A sad smile crossed her face. She had known that it was only a matter of time before she lost her job. She traced the intricate designs on the table with her fingers pondering on the step she was about to take. A small bird flitted to the fence and began to sing.

Hope is in the whispering wind,
in a nightingale's song,
in music,
in every melody that celebrates life.

She listened for a while and then took a sheet of paper and penned down her will. She would be donating all her savings to an orphanage – which was not much, but it was the gesture that counted.

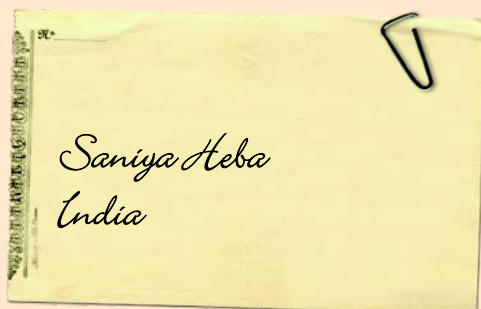
Hope is in the masked vigilantes,
in unthought of charities,
in presents,
in every loaf of bread gifted.

She crossed the fence and slipped out of her shoes. Stretching her toes, she walked towards the ocean. It was beckoning her now. She ran the last few yards and dived. She held her breath as she sank underwater. Her lungs weren't grasping for breath...yet. She opened her eyes and watched tiny orange and white fishes swim aloside her. From some hidden recesses of her mind came the name: Clownfish. She raised her fingers to touch them but they swam away. She started to feel the need to breathe. Instead of resurfacing, she idled thinking about the soap bubbles and nightingales and rainbows. Her lungs started to burn now and black dots clouded her vision. Her body screamed for oxygen. Survival instinct told her to swim back up. She smiled and closed her eyes.

Hope is in the thrumming of your heart,
in the staccato of your pulse,
in your breath,
in every indication of your life.

Just as she was about to let go, strong hands pulled her to the surface. She spat out the water that she had gulped. The person who had dragged her to the beach started pumping the water out of her lungs. She wanted to tell him to stop but couldn't find her voice. The sand felt warm under her fingertips and she realised how much she would have missed walking barefoot here, watching sunsets, making soap bubbles...

Hope is in new beginnings,
in reviving your passion,
in starting afresh,
in every second chance used.





If you are human, and can read this, I'm sure that you have. By dreaming, I mean not the late night visions that creep into your mind through the undoing of your subconscious. By dreaming I mean, when you zone out suddenly in the middle of the day, in between your work, fantasizing of the life you always wanted or when you are young and have that glint in your eyes to achieve something.

Dreaming is good. It kicks off early, starting from 'I want to be a fireman' to 'I want to win the spelling bee' to 'I want her to like me' and ends unfortunately somewhere around at 'I'm old. I can't do that anymore.'

You realize that hope is fuelled by your dreams. Yet the full power of it is not realized till you take time out to wonder what exactly helps you wonder. It is that powerful magical thing that comes with the package of being plain human? Hope requires faith. And these two together create miracles in this very real and ordinary world.

Isn't it the belief telling you that the visions you have for your life will come true, that the life you always wanted is around the corner, isn't that what keeps you going? When you know you've done badly on that test, yet you wish with all your heart that you magically get respectable grades, and for some wild reason that you had not anticipated, you do get the grades you desired, the feeling of elation that creeps up on your heart after all the hope you had, is priceless.

Hope needs time to fester. You might have your heart set at it. But what you need to get through first is the struggle. You have dreams that you work hard for and then 'Hope' with all your heart that they are realized and wait for the world to work its magic.

There will be times when hope crushes you. It crushes you when your dreams are not being realized. You would be praying to land up in your favorite college, when the time comes, you find out you can't, due to some glitch. Your angry heart wants to give up. And pessimism sneaks up slowly into that hopeful heart of yours. Yet what you get in return of the heartache, is an alternate life that somewhere might just be preparing you

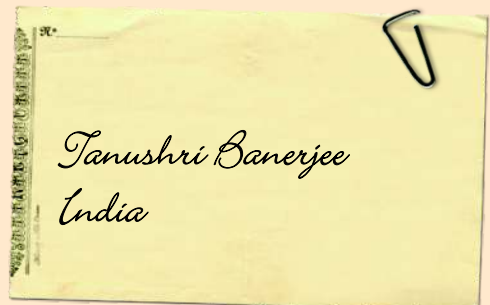
for your dream which you have given up on. And then you realize the magic doing its work. You see yourself becoming successful. In the middle of all the success it dawns on you, that maybe if you keep going, you just might go to that dream college of yours to give a lecture someday. Just maybe. And hope then stands shining brighter than ever, illuminating your life, and keeps you going with double the energy.

Life full of hope is simply a life with purpose. And life with a purpose is a life that aims to make a difference. When the purpose is finally achieved, life is happy. Hope then is the pursuit of happiness. And the movie with the same name can vouch for it.

'It is the oldest story in the world,' It was said in One Tree Hill, one of the best Television Drama series symbolizing hope; 'One day you're 17 and planning for someday. And then quietly and without you ever really noticing, someday is today. And then someday is yesterday. And this is your life. We spend so much time wanting, pursuing, wishing. But ambition is good. Chasing things with integrity is good. Dreaming. Make a wish and place it in your heart. Anything you want. Everything you want. Do you have it? Good. Now believe it can come true. You never know where the next miracle's gonna come from. The next memory. The next smile. The next wish come true But if you believe that it's right around the corner. And you open your heart and mind to the possibility of it. To the certainty of it. You might just get the thing you're wishing for. The world is full of magic. You just have to believe in it. So make your wish ... Do you have it? Good. Now believe in it. With all your heart.'

The quote shows what life is about. To believe is to hope. To hope is ultimately to live. No age can ever diminish the wish to be alive, if only hope accompanies you.

Whatever the conditions are, never stop hoping. Never stop living.





When she was conceived,
He said, "I hope it's a boy"
His decision was clear
And her destiny was nailed.
She had no understanding
Of vice and virtue;
So tender was her age
When he accused her of being the
devil's eye,
She dared ask him the reason of his
rage
He screamed, "With you I lost my hope

Isn't that a reason enough to be betrayed?"

It scarred her childhood
And even her youth wasn't spared
She spent time thinking
What crime did she commit

There was nobody to rely upon
None who could change her fate
Life was not to despise
She made herself understand
She had to show her worth
And had to gain respect
But every step towards her success
Brought her closer to distress
She didn't hear any encouragement
She didn't hear any applause
Her journey became more difficult
And that's what she treasured
It was more than an achievement
It was greater than the cause

Deep within, there was a longing
For something every daughter is blessed with
Her life is worth living,
She let herself believe

Then one day, while sitting around his deathbed,
A bitter feeling craved into her heart
She felt the torment of impatience
Her fear was gaining strength
There he was lying,
Waiting for the burden to be lifted
He didn't look at her
Neither made an attempt
His pride didn't leave him till the end,
As she watched his soul slip away
And there went her hope
Leaving her in an empty darkness

But, she didn't let the innocence die
And her greatness deceive her
She lived with hope
And it didn't end there



Soma Bhattacharjee
India



It came as a rude shock when Vaibhav's export consignment was rejected and his company incurred a loss of 20 lakhs. He was a middle-aged man who had secured a respectable position in the commercial plant biotechnology business. His company covered almost 50 products comprising medicinal plants, flowers, fruits and vegetables which were exported to several countries in the Middle East, Europe, Africa and Australia. He had recently started a

new R&D wing where a unique high-yielding variety of tissue-cultured banana plants were produced for export purposes. This was their first consignment of the newly-developed plant variety to a US-based agriculture company.

He was busy contemplating about the company's loss in his office room when Ramesh, the General Manager and also, his childhood friend, entered.

"We've to deal with the crisis." Ramesh said in a rush with nervous agitation.

"Did you find out the cause for such rejection?" Vaibhav's face exhibited flashes of red and white colour, with frustration and discontent that had become predominant in the moment's concern.

"It may be that the plants that were sent abroad were not quarantined properly. The plants were infected with viruses which were detected at the customer's end. We're willing to replace the infected plants. But our client has refused to accept that." Ramesh explained with a note of uncertainty.

"Now, what's the solution?" Vaibhav asked with a flicker of irritation and restlessness in his voice.

"We'll have to apply for a loan from our bank."

"No. We'll shut down the R&D lab and continue with our usual business. If we sell the lab and its specialised equipments, it may help us to cover some amount of the loss."

"At present, we would be unable to absorb the R&D staff. So, we'll have to let go off people in order to survive this crisis. Fifty people will lose their jobs. Out of them, 45 workers are doing the labour-intensive work of producing the tissue-cultured plants. Five scientists are overseeing their work. It would be a pity to lose them, as they have performed extremely well in the past." Ramesh added seriously.

Vaibhav wasn't in favour of applying for a loan from any financial institution, as there was no certainty that the company would regain its reputation in a short span of time and repay the loan. It took years to build the reputation but a difficult moment ruined it all.

"Please call a staff meeting tomorrow. I'll inform the employees personally about this..." Vaibhav said uncomfortably.

Vaibhav's disappointment knew no bounds. His mind was drifting in the pleasant reminiscences of his achievements as an entrepreneur and also, the milestones that were reached by his company. It was recently that the company was selected in the category of the best ten agriculture companies of the country.

It was not long before he realised to reconnect with the reality and leave aside the sense of hopelessness and depression that had overpowered his inner self. He decided to go home and prepare for the next day when he would be making the sad announcement to his employees.

Vaibhav's house was an hour's drive from office. On his way back home that day, he stopped by his favourite tea stall.

'Babu, would you care for a cigarette?' Bablu, the owner of the tea stall, asked.

Vaibhav didn't feel like connecting with anything that was a part of the real world, even if it was his favourite brand of cigarettes. He was confused by the strange impulses that struggled within him and a feeling of melancholy seemed to engulf his senses.

He was surprised to find Bablu's assistant Sajid sitting inside the small stall, as it was always the assistant who would do the running around part.

'Here you are, Babu.' Bablu handed a packet of Vaibhav's preferred brand of cigarettes.

'Why are you serving the customers today?' Vaibhav couldn't resist his curiosity.

"Sajid lost both his legs in a road accident." Bablu narrated briefly with tears welling up in his eyes.

"I could have hired another boy for helping me out with the business, but I decided to deal with the situation together with him. If I leave him, he would die. An employee who has served right from the initial days of my business doesn't deserve this sort of a treatment." His words were soaked with a great deal of affection and sincerity that was straightforward yet extraordinary.

"We're trying to collect the money for a Jaipur foot. We would earn the amount. It may take some time but we'll do it."

Vaibhav was intrigued by the philosophy he was hearing and also his perspective on the importance of having faith in oneself and being a support system for his employee. He could actually connect to the fact that he could elevate his consciousness and adopt a rational strategy that authentically delivered on its promise.

Vaibhav had no words but the cloud of helplessness and despair that had accumulated in his mind had cleared a bit, as he felt a strange satisfaction, gaining a deep appreciation of the newly-found wisdom.

The hours of that day passed with a seamless flow of worries and contemplation about the best possible way to attend to the unavoidable circumstances that demanded a rational solution. At last he decided to apply for a loan from his bank against his personal property to cover the financial loss. He thought of exploring the domestic market to sell his newly-developed tissue-cultured banana plants. Though the profit would be far less than what it would have been if he could export those to foreign countries, this would help him in stabilising the financial condition of his company.

The next morning the entire staff of the R&D lab assembled in the conference room. Vaibhav could read the faces of his employees which were pale with fear and apprehension of losing their jobs.

"It's not easy to survive in a corporate industry, but we should never give up our values for anything in the world." He paused for a while and glanced at the employees in order to be sure that his introductory words had gathered their attention.

"We're going through a bad phase. It's perhaps the first time that we have

undergone such a huge loss. But I don't wish to lose any of you as I have full faith in your abilities. We'll learn from our mistakes. You may have heard about the wild geese who migrate from one place to another in a group. If one of the geese falls sick on their way back to their homeland, they make sure that another one stays back to take care of the bird. Until and unless the sick bird regains strength to fly back, the other bird stays with it. There should always be fellow feeling among colleagues and we should help each other in times of crisis and need. Let's pledge to work hard together and once again achieve the goodwill of our company that has been lost only for a short while."

"We'll try our level best". Everyone said in unison.

Vaibhav's eyes moistened as he could deeply and emotionally connect with his employees who were surprised yet relieved. He resumed with a reassuring smile, "Let us all make a new beginning."





"Swim! Swim! Try with all your might!" we screamed but Kalu wouldn't hear us. He couldn't. The water in that black well swallowed him up. After what seemed to be an eternity, he came up. Only that it wasn't our Kalu anymore. It was just a body floating on top of the well. We cried and cried till our throats were hoarse. People came and brought it out of the well and laid it out on the ground. We gathered around our dear departed brother. Though sorrow was

new to us, yet it came naturally. I hoped that no one else would have to go through the same painful experience. My heart sank, for it knew that sorrow is endless and death is immortal.

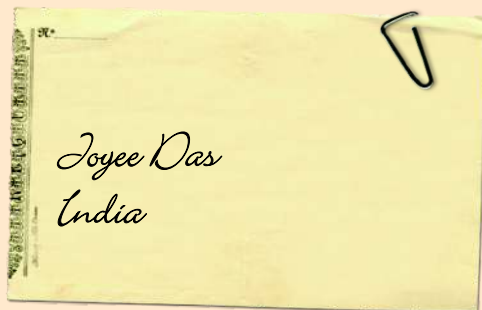
One day, inside the house, my mother could hear the tearful mewing of the kittens. She could feel the hair beginning to stand on her arms. She could compare their mewing with the crying of babies. It disturbed her. It sounded like someone mourning. She called the gardener and requested him to go and see why the kittens were screaming.

One of the little kittens had drowned in the black water drum. It probably got too close to the edge while playing and slipped. When the gardener picked out the tiny body from its watery grave, the kittens screamed all the more. My mother asked, "Which one was it?" "The black one", replied the gardener. Her heart sank. The smallest and her favourite was gone! Why, she had just watched him yesterday afternoon from her bedroom window, chasing a butterfly and then playfully hitting his ginger-furred sibling! She couldn't bear to go and look at his...it's... body. "I hope I never have to hear them mourning again." This was the silent prayer which she said in her heart.

There was a knock on my door. Jayati, my twin sister entered. With misty eyes, she said, "You'll never believe what happened...." Saying thus, she narrated the whole happening to me.

I sat down on my bed with a lump in my throat. It was true that I had never even seen that kitten, for my exams weren't over yet and I would be home only in December. But mother had told me so much about them. She had even sent the pictures of the adorable kittens, all born inside our shed in the backyard. I had hoped to see all of them. But that was never to be. A few tears trickled down my cheeks. 'Cats do not go to heaven. Women cannot write the poetry of Shakespeare'... 'They have souls of some sort...' Were those the lines? Virginia Woolf. Shakespeare's sister, was it? Ah. A Room of One's Own. That was it.

It is December now and I am back at home. I can hear the playful mewing outside, it but happy mewing. Pulling back the curtains, I could see three kittens jumping on top of one another, chasing their own shadows, content in their own little world. "Look! You'll miss them! They're running away!" I screamed excitedly to my twin. Jayati looked, and we smiled at each other. I see the hope in my eyes reflected in hers. I stopped myself from humming "I can see forever..." With such silly randomness I sighed. I hoped to see the kittens forever, gambolling in my garden, reminding me of my childhood, spent sparring with my twin. For the kittens, as for us, life must go on. But I go on hoping that some creatures remain frozen in time and in their infancy... kittenhood. Childhood does seem glorious when trudging wearily through adulthood. Ennui... ah it's such a grand word for dullness. Ah what a joy it'd be! To be a child again! A hope that I must go on hoping, even though, it may seem to be in vain.





Unlike what many of the outsiders thought, being reincarnated into another human was not the mark of a righteous life. It was a mark of a flawed life, of choices both good and evil, of kindness and malice mixed like shadows cast on one object by many sources of light.

The righteous were reincarnated as fish.

Some outsiders, Rumi knew, had the custom of eating fish eggs. The thought was abhorrent to her. It was almost like slaughtering a pregnant cow and eating the unborn calf. Eating an animal that had lived could elevate their flesh, in particular if the one who had consumed them was righteous himself. Eating an animal that had no chance to live before being killed was repulsive.

On the day the moon renewed herself and on other holidays and special occasions, mother would go to the fish wares beside the harbour and purchase one or two beautiful fish. They ate seafood on other days, of course. Shrimp, mussels, or tiny little fish that she would fry with crusts of bread and a bit of lemon, until it was almost tasty.

Rumi's brother Zev was greedy and spoilt. He would spit out the little fish during the week and on holidays try to take more than his share until mother would hit his hand with a wooden ladel.

As Rumi suddenly grew taller during her thirteenth year, things seemed to worsen. Grandpa died and grandma grew dreamier, her blind eyes milkier. Zev grew too, bigger and stronger and more demanding, and mother's stomach bulged with another child.

Rumi sat on the roof when the stars came out, little pinpricks of light like mother's precious steel needles. She thought of how all her family's bodies were changing. She herself was clumsier, her limbs longer. Soon, mother told her, she would bleed. Rumi dreaded it. The neighbor's daughter Amani hurt so much during her time, she stayed in bed for three days. They could not afford it. Rumi had to stay strong, now that the baby was coming.

The baby. Mother was still the same. With her strong, callused hands, her deep dark eyes, but she was more tired and her face wrinkled in more frowns than smiles, and her stomach curved. She had Rumi place her hand there, to feel the baby stir and kick. "She swirls around like a fish, sometimes," she told Rumi. "Twirling and twirling. She's strong."

"When is your time?" Rumi asked, trying to calculate.

"Around summer solstice," mother said, and her hand stroked Rumi's face gently, even as the lines on her face deepened. Mother's worried, Rumi thought. Then, I should be too.

Zev grew too, but not the way Rumi did. He was wilder and ate more and ran away with his friends when he should be running errands. Grandpa used to restrain him, with a glare or a sharp rebuke or by holding Zev's arms hard until he stopped squirming. But grandpa died on one of the rainy nights toward the end of winter, his body growing still and cold and empty. Besides, Rumi thought, gazing at the waxing moon, Zev had grown since then, perhaps strong enough to wiggle from grandpa's grasp.

While Zev grew stronger, grandma grew weaker. Rumi remembered, vaguely of the time, when grandma used to help around the house more, and had more teeth, and more stories to tell. Now grandma spent most of her time wrapped in layers of clothes and blankets now rocking in the old rocking chair, dozing. She spoke more to complain about how tasteless the gruel was than to tell Rumi about Liah the Prophetess or Foresh, the poor woodcutter. Grandma knew many tales of simple people and great people, of kindness and cruelty, but lately she seemed to forget most of them.

This is something grandma told me a long time ago, Rumi thought. She said that like the way the moon waxed and waned, never remaining the same, so were people. I was too young to understand then. I thought people were set like clay molds. The world is like the sun, grandma said. The sun was ever present, never changing. "There always was, always will be," grandma had said, so long ago. "Poor and rich, war and peace. That is eternal. But people, sometimes they are full, sometimes empty. Remember that, Rumi."

As the days grew warmer, it seemed to Rumi that all she and mother did was work. She'd carry water and help mother scrub the piles of clothes and hang them up and then start again. Sometimes she would make a run

to the market to buy some cabbage and onions, the scrapings of the barrel of fish, a bit of grain for gruel, old bread from the baker's generous wife. As Mother grew more tired they did less work, and had less money.

One day when Mother was out to bathe in the Mother's spring as all pregnant women did, Rumi saw Zev return home with his pockets bulging with apricots and cherries. His mouth was already stained with fruit and his eyes were insolent.

"You stole that from Rimon's garden, didn't you," Rumi said, trying to restrain her own anger.

"I was hungry," Zev said. "Mother doesn't buy enough food."

Rumi's hands clenched. "We don't have enough money. You know you shouldn't steal!"

Zev took an apricot and bit into it. It looked so ripe and sweet Rumi's mouth watered. "If you and mother worked harder I wouldn't have to steal," Zev said, chewing.

Her fury rose faster than a wave and Rumi slapped him. She seized his shoulders and shook him, helpless anger tasting bitter in her mouth. "If you took a job on the docks we would have more money, stupid."

Zev shrugged out of her grasp. "I was going to offer you some," he said, "but now I won't."

He left, probably off to his good for nothing friends. Rumi gazed at him. When I was his age, I was already doing most of the work around the house so mother could do more laundry, she thought. He's already ten. When will he stop acting like a child?

The baby was born twelve days before the summer solstice. Hadia, the midwife came when Rumi called her at twilight. At dawn break her cries filled the house. Rumi paid Hadia from the money mother saved in a wooden box under grandma's bed. "They are going to live," Hadia told Rumi. "But your mother is very weak. She needs to rest and eat and to drink tea of Chasteberry and Angelica. Understand?"

Rumi nodded. She slipped into her mother's room and gazed at them both. Mother was sleeping, her face relaxed. The baby was sleeping too, wrapped in a soft cotton blanket, little face scrunched, eyes shut tight. My sister, Rumi sighed, smiling.

She spent the rest of the money in the box in a visit to the herbalist, then prepared some tea and broth to soak bits of bread in, and brought it to mother.

Mother sipped the tea and her hand trembled slightly. She glanced at Rumi. "Don't look so worried, I'm going to be all right," she said.

Rumi crouched near mother's cot. She leaned her head against Mother's thigh. "How am I going to do all the work?" she asked softly.

Her mother's hand stroked her hair. "News has traveled by now. I told most of them that I would not be able to launder for them after I had the baby. Only Yana will send us clothes. You can do those, right?"

Rumi nodded against her mother's palm.

"And we have more money in the box, it should last until I feel better. Don't look so gloomy."

Rumi nodded again. She didn't have the heart to tell her mother that the money in the box was all gone. Instead, she kept her growing worry to herself.

As summer solstice drew nearer, preparations in the city for the festival intensified. This year the solstice fell on the day of the new moon, hence doubly blessed. Rumi had no time planning for the festival. Doing Yana's laundry, taking care of her mother, and doing the rest of the household chores overwhelmed her. She didn't even have time to wonder where Zev went at all hours of the day.

On the day before the solstice, Rumi woke and prepared a little food for her mother and grandmother. Then she sat down, and all the thoughts she hadn't allowed before crowded her head. All around, the neighbours were preparing for the holiday. What about them? They hardly had money, not enough to buy nice fish or fresh bread or newly ripened fruit for the light ceremony and meal. No colorful wax candles, no flowers, nothing. And there was nothing Rumi could do about it.

She clenched her fists and stared at the barren room. At this point in grandma's stories, a mysterious stranger would arrive with gifts in exchange for hospitality. The stranger would bless them for their kindness, and after he left they would realize that he was the Holy Beggar, or the Righteous Matron. But such strangers were travellers, who came to distant villages or lonely cabins. Who would find his way to the end of the alley, to their home?

Rumi buried her head in her hands. She was so tired. Hadn't she done enough? Hadn't she carried the burden of working and caring for the others all by herself?

No one will prepare for the holiday if I don't, Rumi thought. She stood up, grim and discouraged.

First she begged for some wood from the baker's wife. There, they had fuel to cook with. The money would not be enough to purchase food and candles, but flowers were free, if she could go to the west hills.

Zev dashed by the alley and Rumi grabbed his arm. He skidded to a stop. "Let's go, come on!"

"Listen!" Rumi said firmly. "You're going down to the docks, and you're going to help one of the fisherman with hauling. Work until he pays you with a nice, big fish. Understand?"

Zev squirmed. "I'm busy, I can't"

Rumi wanted to yell at him, but reined in the impulse. She crouched down and met her brother's eyes. "Please?" she said softly. "You know how a fish for the holiday will make mother happy."

Zev looked down, then swallowed and nodded. "Fine, I'll do it."

Rumi exhaled and let him go. He turned and began running to the docks. It's happening, Rumi thought. We're going to have a proper holiday. She felt a smile grow on her face and a skip add to her step as she made her own preparations.

When the sun hung low in the sky and the shadows lengthened Zev returned. He had a bundle in his hands, but she was scowling. Rumi watched his approach anxiously. Everything had gone so well until now.

"Here," Zev said and thrust the parcel into her arms. She peeled back the paper.

The fisherman had given her brother only half a fish, headless, the shiny silver skin a contrast to the pink flesh. Rumi put a hand on her brother's arm. "Hey, you did good," she told him.

"It's going to be enough?" Zev asked.

Rumi nodded. She would make it enough.

When night fell they lit the candles and sat around the table with the food

Rumi prepared, the fragrance of the dishes mixing with the smell of freshly picked flowers. Mother was full of praise, grandma had stories to tell, and Zev sat with them too. It was a holiday like any other, but it was precious to Rumi, because of all it had taken to achieve. We did it, she thought contentedly.

Zev boasted he would remain awake all night. Rumi stayed beside him, but soon found her eyelids drooping. She fell asleep, and dreamed.

"I was a righteous woman," the fish told her, "I gave alms to the poor, and was always honest with my customers. When I died, I was reincarnated as a fish. You ate only half of me, though. I cannot rest now. Please, help me. Help me move on."

Rumi awoke to see the candles reduced to blobs of wax, and Zev dozing beside her. Just a dream, she thought, but when she dozed off the fish spoke to her again.

She could not dismiss it.

Rumi sat on the roof as the sun rose and watched the revelers emerge from their homes to begin the daylong celebration on the streets. How could this happen to me? She marveled. She heard of the men who had such dreams, but they were always extraordinary people, not somebody like her.

And what can I do? Rumi thought. I'm just a laundress' daughter. I don't know how to fix it. She leaned against the railing and closed her eyes. Above, the gulls called out.

If I do not help her, who will? I managed to make the holiday. If I have faith in myself, if I try and don't give up, I can.

Rumi's eyes opened and she looked at the place where the ocean met the sky, and made a silent promise.





Close your eyes and dream,
Of the world you want to see.
For those endless fears that tangled
you
For the countless days that baffled
you.

Isn't time just another creation of
man?
Barring one from thinking and
trapped in worldly occupations
Scaring every single entity of the
nation

And closing all doors to your imaginations.

There's a brave man who questioned, the things the way they are
He was awarded with loneliness and they blamed it on his stars.
For all those things that made you feel bizarre,
Stand up and fight for the things the way they are

Courage will give you the power
But it's your honour that will bring your glory shower.
Those moments when your heart shall truly smile
Will sweep away the harsh past to a thousand mile.

Till that time
Close your eyes and dream
Of the world you want to see.





That year had been a devastating one for me. Recession hit the world economy like a tsunami and it swallowed me too, in its giant waves of panic and retrenchment. As companies across the world crumbled and crippled, I found myself thrown out of the job market that was re-shaping itself, trying to get rid of the excess weight that hung around its neck. The large MNC bank that had doled out bonuses year after year to its thousands of employees, was now

on a downsizing mission. And I, who had hardly been there for two months, was among the first ones to be shown the door, thrown out from the sinking ship in an attempt to save itself.

A fresh graduate who had started out with great hopes and an assured paycheck every month, I felt completely at a loss after I was unceremoniously given the pink slip. In a single day, the sky above me fell and the ground beneath me withdrew.

For the next six months I saw myself searching for a decent job and mining through various online job portals, applying for all jobs that I thought suited my stature and education. With each passing day and no response from potential employers, my morale grew weaker, my sense of humour waned and wrinkles of anxiety made their appearance on my forehead. I lost appetite not just for my mother's home cooked food but also for everything else in life – TV, sports, newspapers, music and friends. I became jealous of my friends who were lucky to have been able to hold on to their respective jobs even during this adverse economic climate. I shied away from meeting any of them.

My parents were worried about my situation and had fears that I could be having suicidal thoughts. I could hear their hushed whispers in the drawing room. These made me feel as if I was a burden to them.

One day, news of my grandmother's death reached us and we immediately set forth for our village. After the end of rituals, talks turned to as to how the property should be taken care of. My father, being the only son of his parents was entitled to the property. But living far in the

city, he couldn't tend to its affairs. One of the distant uncles then suggested that since I was without a job presently, I could probably stay at the house in the village and attend to the farming activities.

I gritt my teeth in anger at the prospect of having to come and stay in a remote village, cut off from the corporate playgrounds where I had wanted to carve out my name. My parents too were apprehensive about the idea initially, but after much coercion from relatives they convinced me, or rather forced me to stay back in the village.

As the family members began to depart one by one, I stood there at the threshold of the house. Despondent and desolate, I lied down on the couch in verandah of the vast sprawling ancient styled house of my grandparents, trying to reconcile to my bad fortune. The darkness that was descending as the evening turned into night increased my feeling of hopelessness and despair. And I fell asleep.

I was awakened in the morning by a girl who brought a jug of milk. I blinked my eyes, initially unsure as to why I was there alone in this place. Ram Prasad, the cook, who was called Ramu for short and with affection, was already in the kitchen when I got him the milk jug. "Did Savitri come or her daughter?" Ramu asked. I replied that it should be the daughter since the girl looked small and frail.

After the breakfast, Ramu took me around the fields where men were working and explained to me the various crops grown, the number of men employed and so on. I listened carelessly even as I scanned the landscape around with awestruck eyes. Faded scenes from my childhood of walking through the fields with grandpa, dad plucking ripe guavas from the trees and jumping into the lagoons with some neighbourhood boys, re-surfaced my memory.

While returning home, as we passed through Savitri's house, Radhamani, her fourteen year old daughter smiled and waved as she saw us pass by. She was sitting on the verandah and reading her textbooks. "Poor thing", Ramu said, "She has cancer and won't live much."

I was dumbstruck. She looked so normal to me.

In the evening, I saw her playing 'Gilli Danda' in front of her house. She saw me looking and motioned me to join her. I played with her for a while. As the sun began to set, she said, "I need to go and study now. I'm in tenth standard and am appearing for the board exams." Even before I could

reply she sprinted into her house. And I could hear her open her text books and read the lessons.

I came to know from Ramu that Radhamani was lonely since most of the parents in the village had forbidden their children not to play with her. She was not even allowed to attend the village school, after she was diagnosed with cancer. It was only after the village pradhan intervened that the school agreed to allow Radhamani to be on its rolls so that she could at least write the exams.

"But I don't know why the girl is struggling to study so hard, even when she knows that there is no use", he sighed. In a more serious and melancholic tone he added, "She knows she'll die soon."

While all these increased the sympathy and pity I had for the girl who got me a jug of milk every morning, it also increased my admiration for her.

One day as she was about to sprint into her house after our evening games, I asked her, "Are you sure you'll pass your exams?" She looked back with a look that said 'what a silly question' to ask and answered, "Of course, I'll pass." A lump grew in my throat and my eyes turned moist.

Probably she sensed my pity for her and said, "I know that there is probably no point in me passing the exam because I'm most likely not going to be alive to reap its fruits. But if I happen to live by god's grace, which I hope and pray, then the certificate would be very essential. I need to pass because I need to support my mother and do good things in the world."

And she ran back into her house. At the threshold she turned back, smiled a little and said, "Don't worry, I'll be your friend for many years. I won't leave you so soon. My mother says so. She says she prays for me daily and doesn't give up hope." I waved her goodbye, forced a smile and returned back.

I admired the optimism, the hope that she carried. It was something that I had lost when I lost my job, when I thought that my life had come crashing down. And here was a girl who worked hard to pass an exam because she hoped that she would live long despite being afflicted with cancer. Her hope was so strong that it had come to be something that she believed would be true. And there was her mother, who fed her on this hope, because she believed in her prayers and had faith that they would be answered.

I realized that it is hope that inspires you to work hard. Hope keeps alive in you the fire to fight out the odds of the world because you believe that there will be a better tomorrow.

My fight, then began in my quest to stand on my own feet. I began to slowly take interest in the activities on my grandmother's farms and even began to ask questions on how they could be improved. My brain began to search ways of improving farm output, reducing costs and building up an agro-business empire.

On the last day of her board exams, I walked Radhamani to the exam venue. She was positive and happy that she had been able to do all her previous exams well. I waited outside under the shade of a tree as she was completing her paper. About half an hour before the exam was due to be completed the headmistress came to me and told that Radhamani had fallen unconscious. I rushed her to the hospital. But she was declared brought dead. She had passed away before being able to see her hopes come true. Her mother's hopes were probably shattered. But her hopes of a tomorrow had ignited in me the spark of hope of creating a better tomorrow for myself. It had taught me that you need to move ahead and not reel under failures or fear of failures. And my efforts, inspired by the brave spirit of that little girl, prospered and bore plentiful fruits and I'm sure she must be watching over me from her heavenly abode.

GLOSSARY

Gilli Danda – A game played with sticks





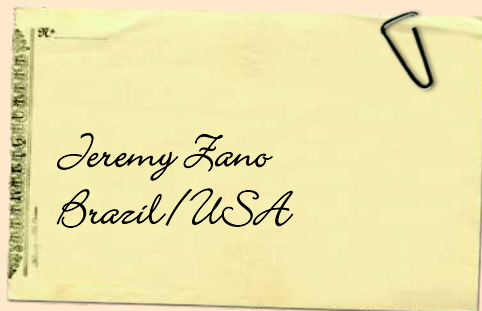
Hope this was your name,
And perhaps for that, you have been.
I still have a small bouquet
of fine auburn hair,
That, perhaps over the years,
fail to do justice
To your unusual beauty.

I still can't understand
Your rush, your need
Running around the world,
when you told me
that your heart was in a cage

And you were happy to have me as
a master lock.

If you had not rushed,
Perhaps caught the next plane,
Everything would have been different...
But what matters is that, I know
You don't want me to cry
Your absence,
But remembering your smile,
I never forget that I'm alive.

You will always be my gentle hope.
Your name condenses my life from now on.
If I can't have you,
I can't live without your joy.
Never stop talking about you at all
That person who cries,
For I found in you, Hope,
The desire to share a spark of your name,
Hoping the tear ceases
In a shy smile.





The brain is the organ of the rational soul. (Galen)

Scene: Inside a pale balloon-like pocket, swollen with Cerebrospinal Fluid (CSF), sit three molecules, born with unpaired electrons. These Free Radicals have the capacity to do great harm to the human host. They are swimming inside the Cyst on her frontal lobe causing intracranial pressure.

Gamma: This is bliss. Riding high into her Cyst and wallowing here, puffed up and lazy in a big old wet bar, instead of all that circulating up and around the spine. Work is so irritating. Who cares what we're supposed to do. I don't care about Her. I don't play by the rules and I never have. It's me, me, and more me. I just hope the thing doesn't blow and spoil our fun.

Omega: I see what you mean, G-buddy, but this whole thing is getting me nervous. We are still part of the CSF. What if we get in trouble? We're supposed to bring Her brain nutrients, get rid of the waste, protect the brain from shock. What if she gets sick or something, starts getting short-tempered, can't remember what she learned the last minute, and can't see straight because we keep pushing her CSF into the Cyst instead of those cavities, those ventricles. The more it swells, the more it pushes on her optic nerve. What if she goes in for an MRI and they see the spinal fluid going the wrong way?

Just last week she got caught going in the wrong direction on Route 95. She said she didn't see the problem because there was no oncoming traffic. They're taking her license to drive away. And she already got fired from two jobs because the Cyst created her Strong Personality.

Gamma: What if, what if, well what if? They can't do anything about it. That big shot doctor doesn't like to do any surgery, so they got no choice but to ignore us. We didn't make the Cyst in the first place. All the docs tell her she was born with it.

Delta: Excuse me, Gamma, but the times are about to change. That Big Cheese is sending all his patients to a new doc, a woman expert right from

the University of Hannover in Germany. She's the president of some international group of neurosurgeons, just led their conference Hydrocephalus 2008. She and her crew can shape us up in a flash. The first thing they do is trash this little crash pad inside the Cyst. They send us packing and then dismember it, so there's no place left to go except straight to a ventricle and we'll be circulating 24/7.

Gamma (circling around the others with an altered swim gait): Big deal. Those ventricles have been laying low for so many years; they'd drown if the surgeons try to send us over there. Too much talk. Nap time.

* * *

Five years ago, dilation of my pupils in a routine eye exam revealed a large object sitting on one optic nerve. The Ophthalmologist scheduled me to see a Neurosurgeon. "I can't go on Monday because I teach." "This is much more important than your teaching a class. You might have a tumor."

The Neurosurgeon wants me to have an MRI of my brain. I carry the film when I go to his office. It catches the wind on the street and nearly lifts me. He tells me I have a benign cyst in the subarachnoid region of my brain. It's about the size of a small lemon. The famous doctor describes himself as conservative about surgery. "Have an MRI every year and if it gets bigger, you'll just start having seizures." He says little else except to go on-line and read some articles. That would prove not so easy; I couldn't understand anything I found. I exit through a waiting room full of hanging heads.

After five annual MRI's, the Neurosurgeon's Physician's Assistant (PA) tells me the Cyst is the same size. It's okay. But I'm not. I am lethargic. With cognitive capacity diminished in a scapegoat dependent department, I am denied tenure. The last annual review takes a good thing and makes it negative. "She presented papers at six competitive national conferences and didn't publish one."

There is truth to some of the charges. I was mean to students. Classroom issues I used to be able to handle easily had begun to provoke a pedagogy of anger. I tell a student whose relative just died, "I don't care what the reason is. It counts as an absence." To another I say, "You turned in a paper with no textual citations and next semester you will be teaching high school English classes about plagiarism?" I speak so harshly, she bursts into tears.

Everybody outside of the workplace is mad at me. My partner is furious when I set her favorite pan on fire taking a phone call from Bell, a 93-year old woman in my Yiddish schmooze group, calling to see how I am doing. I forgot I was cooking. I am angry, too. My partner is very friendly with the people who don't want me tenured, and I feel betrayed. First she tells me my supervisor complained about me to her. Then she says it didn't happen. I want her to move out. She says, "If I move out, in two weeks they'll be putting you in a nursing home."

My older son calls and tells me to exercise more. I tell him it's winter, that there's a freezing breeze blowing off Narragansett Bay, and not even expedition-level long underwear, wind resistant pants, scarves, and balaclavas are of any help. "Mom, don't you even want to get well?" I drag myself out in the warmest part of the day quickly returning to "Animal Planet" re-runs. Watching this program is the only time I feel hope.

The wife of the just-exercise son calls, "Your problem is artificial sweeteners." She does know a lot about nutrition. I stop eating Splenda for a while. My younger son phones after I pull a U-turn on route 95 and start heading into the traffic. "Mom, don't you know you could have killed families? You could have killed yourself." He is too angry for me to explain that there was no traffic. Besides, I was late getting home; my partner would worry. It was from months earlier when giant policemen in Seekonk surrounded my little Prius on Super Bowl weekend because of multiple reports that I was driving "erratically." The DMV sends a letter saying they want my license unless a doctor will vouch for me. A psychiatrist writes them, "I can't guarantee this won't happen again." My license is revoked until the Neurosurgeon's Physician's Assistant writes telling them, "There is no medical reason for this event." I pass a driver's test and get my license back, but I am scared to drive.

Other people in my support groups keep saying things to me. "Karen, you seemed confused in the parking lot." "Karen, you seem to have trouble taking in information." I stumble walking down a ramp and somehow land on my face. I think I fell and then fainted or had a partial seizure. I sit dazed, and a man offers to help. He gets me my water bottle and asks, "Are you okay to drive?" I am not but say I am because I have a luncheon appointment, a date, with my partner. No lunch. My face is a mess. Instead she drives me to my Primary Care Doctor. Nothing is broken but I can't roll over in bed without knives probing through ribs.

My partner sends letters to my Social Worker and my Psychiatrist.

The Social Worker reads me her letter but he is too passive to directly ask me if he can talk with her; he doesn't respond to her letter. he hates him. The Psychiatrist calls back and leaves her a voicemail. "I'm sorry. I've talked with her Neurologist. We're trying to do something."

Two years earlier I referred myself to this Neurologist because I wondered if my quaking hands were a symptom of Parkinson's. He diagnosed essential tremors. Even though he said they don't know what causes the tremors or how to make them go away, he asked, "Why doesn't your Neurosurgeon just stick a needle in the cyst and drain it?" My hands shake so badly I can only drink soup clutching a mug. The soup sloshes right out of a spoon.

Gamma: Hey, that Neurosurgeon told her to read some stuff online, and I scanned it as it passed by the optic nerve. I looked at her latest MRI. She's got ventricular atrophy. One of those cavities we shut down is getting smaller and the brain is swollen right up to the skull. We got so much "intracranial pressure" going that she won't be able to keep running around to all these doctors. Her gait is off. She shuffles like an old lady. She's incontinent. Her short-term memory is lost. She can't even find the folders she re-located two minutes ago. Hey dudes, we are winning.

Omega: She's aging fast, Gamma, but the more we "win," the more likely it is that she will seek help. She's a fighter. Look at her, she shuffles into the fitness trainer and works out. She's onto us.

Gamma: Yeah, right. She's a shadow of her former self. Before we really kicked in, she was lifting in the men's weight room at Bailey's. She could squat one and a half times her body weight. She was gutting out negatives with that guy who lifts and windsurfs all day. Now everyone knows her shuffle.

Delta: This is no game. What we are doing is wrong. This is a good person. After her father died, she vowed to spread Good Will. That ancient doctor Galen, says the ventricles communicate with each other as psychic pneuma pass through her nerves. We are interfering with her Soul, killing off her vital spirit.

I tell my worried and angry older son I have a hundred dollar a week co-pay habit. My Primary Care Physician refers me to a Urologist, who says the brain is directing the bladder to urinate whenever it feels like it. "Why

doesn't your Neurosurgeon do something about that cyst?"

Under pressure from my partner and not knowing what's wrong with me, I accept a psychiatric referral from the new Social Worker. I try three different anti-depressants, which, along with every other medication, make me tired but have an immediate effect. My taking the pills calms my partner down, too.

The calm doesn't last. I am aware that my vision is diminishing. I go back to the Retina Specialist who says I need to see a Neuroophthamologist. This referral takes me to a well-known Boston hospital (with a hired driver). The Neuroophthamologist sees the Cyst when my pupils are dilated and wants to talk with both my Neurologist and my Neurosurgeon. The Neurologist calls and wants me to phone the Neurosurgeon and tell him to do something, and if he doesn't respond, they will call him. I am almost too scared to do this. I am the patient. Why don't they call? I leave their message on the Physician Assistant's voicemail.

The Neurosurgeon's office calls me for the first time in five years and schedules an appointment. First, there is another MRI that reveals the Cyst is now 8.5 centimeters. My partner takes me to the Neurosurgeon who brings us to a laptop and opens a window showing the Cyst all over the right side of my frontal lobe and encroaching over the left side as well. She would be nice to me for at least two weeks after this demo. The Neurosurgeon tells me surgery is necessary. Since he has "followed" my case for five years, he will do it, but he wants me to meet Dr. Klinge, a new colleague from Germany, whom I will like and who is an expert in handling my condition. He calls her when we are in the room and says, "You will really like this woman." This seems hard to believe. No one likes me. We go to see her twice.

Dr. K. explains very carefully what she will do and a scary back-up plan, a shunt from brain to abdomen. First, she and her team will go inside my brain and dismember the cyst, "fenestrate" or make a hole in a near-by ventricle, and let blood pressure send the cerebrospinal fluid that way. She is very clear, very confident, and very convincing. I decide to trust her with my life.

First, Dr. K. orders a different kind of MRI, one that shows the ventricles draining. The Radiologist calls her while she is in surgery with another patient and tells her she must do something about my case immediately.

He does not know how I am walking around. I come down with bilateral conjunctivitis, and the surgery is delayed for two weeks. My younger son flies in, and he and my partner take me to the hospital. I recall nothing for almost nine hours.

Gamma: What's that noise? Sawing...whirring. Somebody is coming in.

Omega: Oh, no!

Delta: We are biohazard.

Gamma: Tugging...Can't hold...

Claudine and Derek are in the waiting room for over eight hours until she, someone who rarely speaks up, goes to the operating room to find out what is happening. All is fine. "We are just closing up." (A Resident named Chris would later demur about closing up my skull. "I just kept stapling." There were 53 staples.)

I am in my room. All is dark, but I sense that Claudine and Derek are present. I am very troubled by the medication. I know many women in my support group have relapsed with alcohol from pain meds. I am nauseous from the anesthesia.

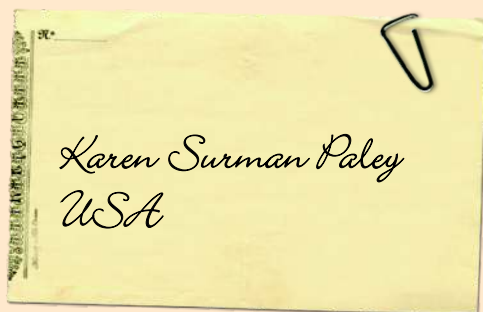
In the hospital I am infatuated with Dr. K, and all the nurses and Physician Assistants love her; two tell me they are in love with her. She comes for rounds early, but her male residents nag her to keep moving. She returns alone later in the day and stays 30 minutes. I feel like I am in medical school but high on all the meds.

Then comes the day when my team is afraid the Ventriculostomy is not working. They say I am not doing well. I have no idea why. Dr. K. comes in to promote the traditional shunt procedure. They will do another surgery and insert a tube from my brain down through my body to drain CSF into my abdomen. For the first time, I don't hang on every word she says. I am too scared to listen. Would I survive another surgery so close to the one less than a week before?

That night I have a vivid sheet-soaking Holocaust dream. I am both my grandmother and myself going back to Poland to pack up her house because the Nazis will be there any minute. (So, I think every German is a Nazi?) In the dream I yell at my helpers, "You are not working fast enough." We load everything into a small pick-up truck. Some of the items are ones I have in my own house today. In the middle of the night I awake, call my

sister Arlene, and tell her the dream. The message is clear to me. I am a third generation Holocaust survivor, and enough of my ancestors escaped so that I could come into being. If I need to have the shunt procedure, I will survive just as they did. When Dr. K. comes on special afternoon rounds, she has in tow one of her impatient Residents. Because I am sick of him bossing around his Attending, I tell the story of the dream, knowing he would never dare to interrupt such a highly charged narrative. At first he is pacing like a wild man and then he listens. I am babbling through the tension in the room. When I use the word Holocaust, my German doctor flinches, but she listens intently as always.

Two months after surgery I have a follow-up MRI. Dr. K. is delighted. 'Your brain is re-structuring itself.' She has printed 'before' and 'after' copies of the MRI, and you can see the brain growing back over the shell of the Cyst. Every day is different. Most days I am full of gratitude for my life and full of love for all around me. Finally free of all mind-altering medications, I see what I have to work with...





Swollen red eyes, tears trickling down her cheeks relentlessly, she was going through an excruciating pain in her life. The crests and troughs of the emotional storm were way too high. On a spur of a moment, the volcano inside her erupted and she began wailing. I could hear her scream as she was saying, "Why me? Why always me? Whether the lanes chosen by me or chosen by life for me why they always have a dead end and I have to come back all the way and start from

the scratch again...Why it always happens with me?" She sobbed and cried and cried and cursed herself.

Sitting near to her, I was very calm at that moment and caressed her feet again and again so that she may feel lighter. What more could I have done? Sometimes I really do feel crippled when I am unable to soothe someone's heart...I was in despair and it was disturbing me to the core until I heard a very familiar chirpy voice.

I turned back to see a sweet little ebullient girl of eight or nine years old. She was playing with her mother. As her mother called after her, I learnt that her name was Sakhi. They were a little far away from Aanya and me. I dedicated all ears to her for a while. I could listen to her giggles, clapping, and naughty chats as she was enjoying making paper boats and asking her mother to write something on each of them. After it was all done, she took each paper boat in her hands and gaped at the sky for a while as if she was saying something to God and then sailed them one by one on the waves.

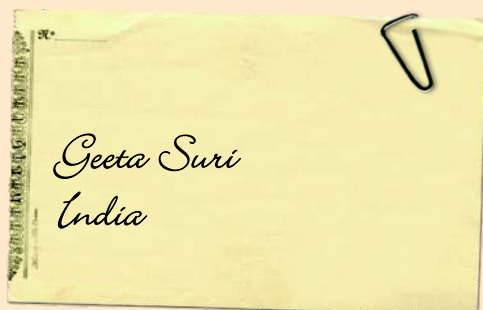
Unfortunately one of her paper boats died (it had to, after some time, Sakhi knew that), but fortunately it sailed all the way to Aanya before dying...

Aanya, in a jiffy, came out of her envelope of grief and exasperation as soon as Sakhi's paper boat touched her feet. She picked it up, there was a small flag tucked inside with something written on it. It took her a while to understand that word...It was '*HOPE*'. While she was busy with it, she realized that someone had crept behind her. They were Sakhi and her mom.

As soon as Aanya turned around, Sakhi tried to grasp her boat. She said that she was sending a wish to God and if this one word is missed then it would weaken her message. Aanya could not bury the curiosity and asked Sakhi about it.

Sakhi passed a faint smile to her mother. Eyes brimming with tears, her mother told Aanya that Sakhi's vision is blurring day by day and after sometime she will become completely blind. Doctors will not be able to do anything until she matures to the age of 18. She said that she comes here daily with Sakhi to send her prayers to God. Today she wrote "*Thank You God for a beautiful day, hope to see more colors tomorrow*". The boat with the word '*HOPE*' jaunted towards you because of the water current.

Aanya was dumbstruck. Sakhi's enthusiasm, & here positive vision towards life of Sakhi at this tender age pricked Aanya's enshroud of grief and slowly it began withering away. She saluted Sakhi who left with her paper boat written '*HOPE*' on it. Ananya became a wholly new person, with the HOPE brimming into her life with all its fullness.





Akira,

It seemed that the sun rose from the wrong side. The birds were silent for some reason. The only sound I could hear was too faint for me to make out. It came from the headphones which lay near my ears. It's a habit now to listen to music while I sleep. It was a Linkin Park song... (You know how much I love them). But, right now it seemed like a little girl was praying.

"God save us everyone. Will we burn inside the fires of the thousand suns? For the sins of our hands... The sins of our tongue... The sins of my father... The sins of our young..."

It made perfect sense. "Why didn't they win an award for this?" I wondered. I know how much you have tolerated me continuously talking about them, telling you how I plan to make videos of these songs someday that are still a distant dream. I know, I know, you have told me not to be so pessimistic about these things and I am not. I am just scared to fall again. I feel like little Bruce Wayne or Batman who is initially afraid of the dark.

Music is the friend that a person can turn to, anytime of the day or night. It is there for you in your highest moments in life as well as when you are on your knees. Please don't be angry. Even you have been there for me but it is just that you are far away. It's been a few months since we have spoken and there are the things which are certainly going to disappoint you as well as anger you.

I feel a weight so heavy on my mind; it seems to never lose an ounce. I am trying to figure out the exact reason for this, but cannot pinpoint to a single answer.

When I think, even though I don't want to, I am reminded of 'him' (you know him, don't you? He is the same guy who bullied me in school) and the next moment, he is getting beaten up in front of a crowd that acts indifferent, but from within shouts 'don't pity him, kill him'. It is not just him, but a bunch of them now who crowd my mind (they don't exactly bully me, but torture me). There are so many voices shouting, barking that my brain begs me to bring a drill to the temple and pour them out.

"It ain't about how hard you are hit, it's about how hard you can get hit and keep moving forward" Rocky Balboa is right, but these thoughts get

contested when you are trying to run away from everything and the only thing which you desire the most, 'Peace' is a distant dream which is nowhere to be found.

You really get irritated by my overdose of association with fictional characters, don't you? But what do I do? They provide me with an escape from this ruthless reality where people attack me with their faces, their speech, their fake smiles, their jealousy, their hatred, their presence. They wear a mask, no, masks. Yes, they do not wear a single mask, but many.

Nothing new has happened this time. It has been happening since childhood, but in different forms. You came in a later stage of my life, when I was starting anew. I was scared that my old life would scar my fresh start; but as a matter of fact it didn't. The new one was just too perfect to last long.

Before you Akira, I didn't have friends; there were pretentious people around me. In the new life I have climbed minute steps of success. People like me now. They appreciate me. I am centre of something that brings happiness. I have lent my ear to them, but none to me; or I didn't want them to. And I don't regret that, I was always a listener.

"It is something, about which you cannot do anything; people are bound to get attracted to you. You are charming, kind, caring, and compassionate...also you speak with conviction."

One of my mentors said this to me, when I told her how troubled I was. She added "this is something which is bound to increase, you are that good." I wondered with a blank mind.

I know you are still curious about what is going on in my life. So here it is. I met a girl, 'She'. She was a beautiful woman. I liked her and we dated each other for some time. I felt attached to her (even physically). I miss her now; I miss her soft body, her pink lips.

You may feel jealous and angry. Please don't. You still have the same place as you did before. I was off track.

So, she left me in the middle of road. I miss her. If you will ask for the reason, I don't know or maybe I do. But she is not the main reason for my clouded mind.

As I write this Akira, I seem to be losing my stream of thoughts, the things which I wanted to tell you are just getting flushed out.

There are voices shouting, crying, hitting the cage of bones to get out and disappear at warped speed. Your mouth continuously tries to open to

release the pressure of air building up inside you. Your empty stomach rolls back inside. The tongue going mad like a person trapped in an asylum. Your fingers form a fist and want to hit something hard, but you stop yourself and the voices which are building inside take over you. The headphones come to your head. Headphones are like those barriers of sorts, which block your ears and cage your thoughts, leaving them devoid of any means of escape. The songs start adding to your agony. A self-inflicted agony, which you want to desperately get over and yet increase it and take it to a higher cliff from which you throw yourself off. The heartbeat starts to slowdown; you release the breath and get reminded of a quote. 'It is not who you are from inside; It's what you do, defines you' If that is the case then you are not a good person. That is how I felt.

Because in this case, it is not what I think or feel, but rather what I do or appear to do, that matters. I may have the best of intentions at heart and I actually do, but if my actions are misinterpreted, no one will bother to find out the essence of the thought behind what I did. All these people will never see me in light of my thoughts. It's always the actions. Intentions misjudged. Words misconstrued.

On second thoughts, I don't believe I am not a good person.

I know, I can control this situation, but I like to make people happy. But there are people who are like parasites who will suck the blood out of you, but won't leave you; like scavengers they will feast on your dead body.

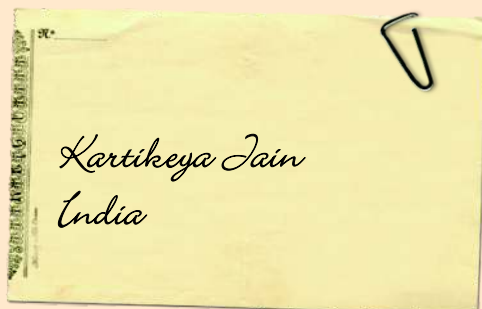
I know you will hate this as usual, I will have to stop writing for now as my station approaches and my friends will be waiting and I don't want them to see you. So for now I will take your leave and keep you in your usual place.

Even a listener needs a listener. Thanks for not judging me. All my thoughts and secrets are safe in your pages. By the way, have I ever told you that you look beautiful in that white dress with the black belt? Well you do. Trust me.

See you when I see you.

Yours Truly,

Akira.



Thoughts on Hope



Hope is faith that i will succeed. I believe in working hard without thinking of the fruit.

Jeethu, India

For me, hope is to feed my family daily, without fail.
Kishan, India



For me, Hope is an assurance of faith that can be found only in my Jesus Christ.
Colin Ferguson,
North Ireland

I hope for women to have more freedom than they do now. On paper, we have rights, we don't have rights. But what is going on here, right now, live, in action, is a different picture.
Rajni Siddharth, India

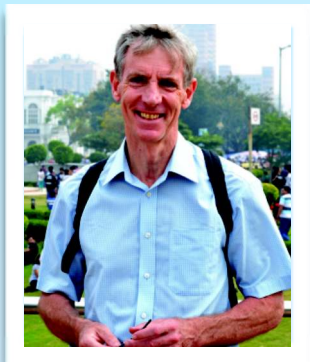


I hope for a better society of freedom to all the sections; of unfulfilled promises to be implemented by the keepers of society.
Paramjit Singh Sahni, India

I hope for freedom of expression to have actual value in our society.
Shobhaa, India



Thoughts on Hope



Hope is eternal, and never passive. We live our life based on it and it is always better to travel in hope than in any other vehicle.

Phil Cottle

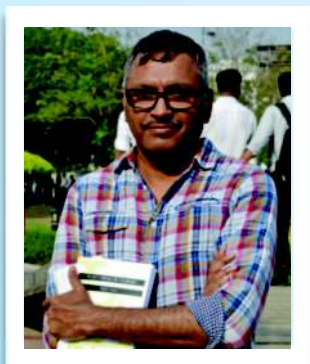
I hope to make my family proud of me and also to be financially secure. Money in a sense makes the act of hoping 'legit'.

I shita, India



I think hope manifests itself for everyone in similar ways one of them being hope for a better future, with less inequality, less poverty and progress in the right direction.

Suresh Rajan, India



Hope is something that we expect in life; this hope goes on and on, along with our life.
Dorjee, India



Hope is the best thing in life. We should never lose it despite all odds because it is one thing that eliminates negativity.
Shoaib, Afghanistan.

Hope is to find yourself without disturbing your inner peace.
Manu, Switzerland





A flash of pink and beige filled her eyes as she took in the landscape surrounding her. Jaipur, the pink city as they called it was her new abode. It looked beautiful to her. A faint blush of pink glowed on her cheeks too, but it was not the wedding bliss that had caused it, but rather the heat. She slid into a rocking chair and rocked herself gently.

"Pushpaaaaaaaaaaaaa", screeched a middle-aged lady from a distance. She got up with a start, steadied her skirt and adjusted her dupatta, and meekly responded to the call.

"You should be in the kitchen, cooking something for your husband and here you are sitting all alone!" chided Seeta, the head cook.

"It's a tradition that we have been following over the years...young girls like you who get married into this family have to pass the culinary test...you have to cook something that would surpass the taste of all the other delicacies made in this same kitchen today..", she continued.

"I will try my best...", replied Pushpa staring at the lavish spread of dishes beneath the intimidating glass chandeliers.

"Pushpa...what is it that you are doing? I am not allowed to help you. See...you don't you even know how to knead the dough? No...this is not how you do it...you first wrap the dough around the kheema and then cook it in this mud pit..." Seeta's litany of suggestions continued.

"What is going on here?" said a voice of a lady who was dressed elegantly in an orange saree with a delicate ear lobe that sagged with the weight of sparkling diamonds. She used to be the youngest bahu in the family fold, all of thirty years, but was now forced to pass on the status to Pushpa, her twelve-year old daughter in law.

"Namaste Maaji," Pushpa bowed down in respect.

"Pushpaa...what a shame that you do not even know how to cook. And why is there no sindhoor on your forehead? Have your parents taught you nothing?"

That day, Pushpa had followed Mohan, her husband, to the school in the neighbourhood. He studied in class nine.

"It was not proper for you to have walked over the lawns like that. Are you even listening to me?" scolded her mother-in-law after she discovered the latter's 'misdemeanour'.

"And don't dare to step outside the house; you are the bahu of this family, and not a kid anymore. Now cover your head with the veil," she continued with her chiding.

The same night, Mohan regaled her with stories about the experiment they did at the school, where a blob of pink appeared on a substance on adding it to the acidic water.

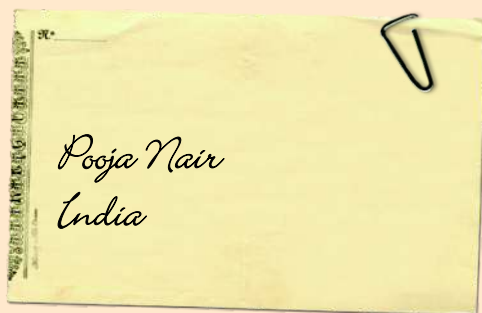
"Come Pushpa. You have to make laapsi today. Remember what I told you yesterday; you need to fry daliya in oil till it turns pink," said a gentle voice of Seeta.

"Yes chaachi. And I will tell Mohan that I finally learnt to cook laapsi for him."

"Good girl."

Pushpa set about her task while keeping an eye on the lab notes that she had pilfered from Mohan's school bag.

After Seeta had left the kitchen, Pushpa clambered the steps of the storehouse, and took a bottle of vinegar from one of the top shelves. She made the cabbage juice and mixed it with the vinegar solution, which then turned into pink immediately. That night, she waited for Mohan and to tell him how she learnt to make his favourite recipe.





Sitting alone in the porch of a café in the month of winter, she is basking and soaking in the shimmering sunshine. She saw many pass by, with overcoats, hands tucked either into mittens or in the pockets, heads covered under hoods. Winter chill added with breezy sunshine masked her vision to the road ahead.

She checked her watch thrice whilst the seconds hand completed its 25th round. Sipping a Blue Lagoon, she is

waiting for him to appear. With butterflies floating in her belly, a jittery chill runs down her spine; they are going to meet each other after a span of five and a half years. Devoured by the thought how'd she react after seeing him, she rehearsed the situation innumerable times. She put across the table the questions and the answers, the awkward gaze and uncomfortable desire, suppressed for years.

Five and a half year ago he left her, without a word, without providing any reasons to which she was entitled. His impatient act, possessive attitude and unimaginable behavior and deeds masked all the love he had deep within for her, which if expressed at the right moment would have had led to something beautiful and magical. But the bond made was left incomplete and over the years left to rot.

She never wanted to see his face again, but at the same time wished that her desire never comes true. Under the sheaths of her layered heart, she sought reasons for his desertion which left her shattered, wounded to the core, with bruises and scars exposed to the world. With different names, he used to call from unknown numbers and every time she could not make out his voice, but never mentioned it.

Suddenly, hearing a chair creak beside her, she came out of her virtual dream and was startled to see him standing in front of her. He was standing there for a long time, or maybe she was too busy in her thoughts that she didn't take notice of his presence. He brought her flowers; white and yellow 'tulips' and a bar of chocolate.

After a brief silence, he asked her smilingly, "How are you?"

She couldn't answer. She felt as if her vocals gave up and failed to revive. Looking straight into his eyes, she found that the disambiguated tinge was

still present in them. The eyes that swooned her once seemed different today! They appeared shrewd and seemed to have a set plan. There was neither a sign of regret nor any feeling of remorse in them.

Smirking, he said, "Your eyes still ask me a lot of questions".

A quick flashback ran before her eyes. She recalled everything from day one when they met each other and how things proceeded up to this level, when they almost feel like strangers to each other.

A bedazzled tint shaded her eyes.

He spoke again, "Are you ok? Why aren't you saying anything?"

Transported back to reality, she took her handbag, pulled out a card he'd gifted her, kept on the tabletop, took out her wallet, and paid the bill.

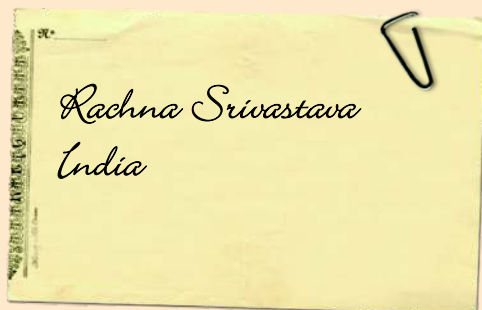
Bewildered by the way she responded, he took the card in his hands, and recalled the situation he'd gifted it to her. He looked at her with a dumbfounded expression.

She smiled, stood up and started to leave without saying a word.

Suddenly, as if reading her mind, he pulled her by the arm and wrapped her, his arm around and softly murmured 'sorry'. She let go of herself, smirked, a smile he had never before seen on her face.

Uttering 'bye' she turned around and left the place. He was left flabbergasted. She didn't even turn back, but kept walking and was out of his vision. He hoped to see her turn back. But she didn't.

Sinking back into the chair, head in his palms, he tried to figure out what just happened. He looked and saw an envelope, on the table, between the folds of the card. Quickly pulling it out, he read out on the envelope on which it was written 'Open the letter only on the day you genuinely regret what you did'.





"It is your only hope now" she heard the doctor pass his final verdict. Jenifer Adams, 19, had been hospitalized now. What began as a chest pain as she blew the candles on her fifteenth birthday had turned out to be Coronary Heart Disease, an illness that was slowly taking away her life. She could not walk without panting like a dog or run or swim or go trekking or boating or whatever it was that her friends were doing. She just could not live!

The very next year she had wished for a miracle as she blew away the candles on the cake. Since then she had tried everything: surgeries, medicines, wishing wells and prayers but god just seemed to have a different plan. She wanted to live and he just wanted her back, it appeared.

"Mom?" she weakly mumbled in her hospital bed.

"Yes honey?" her mother looked up from the case study in her lap.

"Do you think I will make it?"

Penelope Adams just kept staring at her daughter, who was to her the most beautiful girl in the world with deep blue eyes, chocolate brown hair and a permanent blush on her pale skin which seemed to have lost its life. Her daughter was dying in front of her and all she could do was watch...and hope.

When her mother did not reply, Jenifer continued "I want to live mom, I want to live the remaining life I have."

"I just wish you get a brand new heart honey." Penelope had been praying for this since the day she knew it was the only way her daughter could live.

"Yeah, that's my only hope right?"

"Go to sleep Jen."

"Can I go to the park instead? I do not want to live like this mom. I want to race the morning breeze, I want to feel breathless but not the kind of sick breathless I am right now in this bed I want to feel the 'alive' kind of

breathless. I want a life, a real life.

Tears formed in her eyes but Penelope held them back. She simply got up, opened the window and moved Jenifer's bed a little closer to it. "That's all for now Jen." She kissed her daughter's forehead and left the room.

"That's my only hope" she repeated mechanically "my only hope."

An hour later, doctor, Richard, came in with a stack of sheets and Jenifer sat up.

"Getting some fresh air Jenifer?" Doctor Richard took a deep breath.

She smiled and then shifted her gaze at the papers in his hand.

"These" he began with a business like tone "are the papers that promise you a life. They say that you are ready for a heart transplant; they also mention the risks and costs of the procedure. I have already talked to Penelope but you must read them yourself. Just sign them after you go through them. Okay sweetie?"

"Why?" she asked.

"Excuse me?"

"Why do I have to sign these?"

"Why do you have to sign these?" he asked confused.

"Yes."

"Because like I said..."

"It is my only hope." She interrupted.

"Precisely"

"And if I say no?"

"Well, I can't force you into a surgery but then your hopes come crashing down."

"What if I wasn't hoping for this?"

"But this hope is all you have now."

"You don't understand, do you? We are hoping that I survive... nothing wrong with that. But as I hope for my life I also hope that someone dies. It is in their death that I get the hope to love. What kind of a twisted person would I be if I do that?"

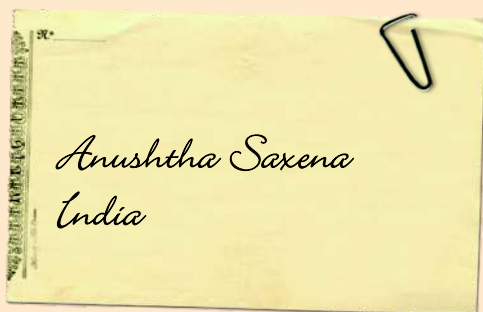
"Honey" Penelope interrupted.

"No mum. I want to live and I will, as long as I can. But I cannot live knowing that I live at the expense of someone's life. Remember I asked for a miracle on my sixteenth birthday? Well I guess 'hope' is my miracle. I can live my life hoping that I would be alive the next day." The resolve in Jenifer's eyes was enough to tell Penelope that her daughter had made a decision that no one could change. Jenifer was discharged the same day and she passed away the very next summer but not before she had lived as she intended.

She had experienced an adrenaline rush, she had felt breathless running in open fields, she had rowed boats, climbed trees to see eggs in the nests, sung at karaoke bars and in all this she had hoped to feel the warmth of the next morning's sun.

Penelope held her dying daughter's hand "we had hope Jen. You had hope." She managed to croak between her sobs.

"I lived with that hope mom. I had only hoped to live and I did, didn't I? And as far as the hope for my long life is concerned, well, hope is a good thing mom but all good things come to an end."





Ponder not on what ye shall see
But on what your thoughts speak ..;

For the greatness of mind is found,
When searched in depths profound

To unknown lands with faith inclined,
Man once travelled miles.

His soul yearned yet to explore,
The existence of living he found
ashore,

With the speed of light,
His thoughts set right.

Enlightened by experience,
Amidst materialistic presence

Faith kept pace,
Whilst Hope rose by will.

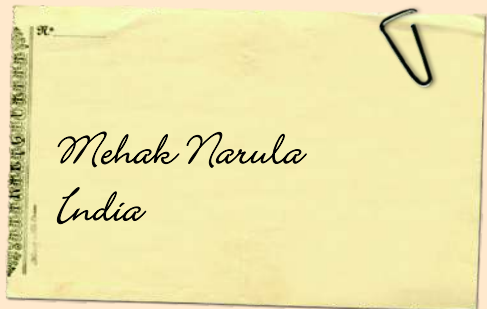
In union with his inner being,
He found great truths.
With the power of hope,
By the direction of faith.

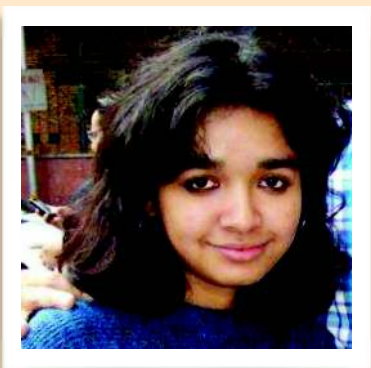
Conviction made it clear,
Even in Hours of despair.

Life lived in hope,
And fought with faith.

A look deep within us,
Would tell at all times,
Inseparable they exist.

In the end it is...and was
between hope and faith.





Smelling the weak coffee in the café, she again read that untidy writing on the page (that had been ripped out of a notebook): 'Meet me at 4'. Feeling too lazy to take out the kiwi lip balm from her handbag, she just licked her lips. Finally, after a long wait, she stood up.

Sitting at the table right behind her, was an old woman, who stared at her. From the way her shoulder muscles

were all tensed, the old woman saw that the girl was agitated about something.

Sensing that she was being watched, she whirled her torso about. The former joined the latter at her table and both ordered coffee and started a conversation.

'I've been coming to this place for the last forty-nine years,' the old woman said.

'Ah!' the girl said, politely.

'And what brings you here, young lady? I saw that you've been sitting here for the past three hours. Alone, yes. But not for solitude it seems.'

'Yes, well. Someone was supposed to meet me here...three hours ago. And that someone has not shown up.'

'So, you're drowning your disappointment in caffeine then?'

'No...I'm hoping that she'll still show up.'

The old woman smiled and said, 'That's what has been bringing me to this place again and again for the last forty-nine years.'

A woman standing behind the counter muttered some instructions to a boy who was polishing the display case. The boy went outside the café and started polishing the golden letters painted on the window: HOPE CAFÉ.

Sitting inside the café, a young philosopher gazed at the boy outside, and

then, at the two women sitting two tables away from him. He sighed and wrote in his notebook –

Hope is like a cup of coffee, sometimes weak and sometimes strong. We let its scent caress the senses, giving in to its addictive magic, and then let its taste linger on the tongue like a dream we are wary to wake from.





A swallow hatched in the dead of night, beneath a jungle of thundering stormclouds. She was small and soft, and so frail, a gust of wind might have picked her up and carried her off to be lost forever. She cowered in her nest, tucked safe beneath her mother's wing until the rage of the storm passed. Her eyes opened, big black pearls to take the world in, and her feathers grew until a soft coat of downy covered her. She watched the crows soar over, black shadows

passing against the layers of gray.

"Soon, you'll learn to fly," her mother said. But as she peered out of her nest, down at the sharp brambles below and the thick clouds above, she ducked inside once more, too afraid she would not know how.

A few nights later it stormed again, and lightning flared across the sky like veins of fire. She ducked under her mother's wing once more as the wind rushed overhead, rocking the branches on which sat their nest. It swayed in the night so much she feared it would toss them out into the air. But by the next morning, the clouds had calmed and all but floated leisurely away, and the swallow chick was almost grown in a few more moons' time.

"Soon, you'll learn to fly," her mother said. But what could be so great about flying, she thought, when the sky was filled with sheets of rainclouds? So she stayed in the nest, safe beneath the leaves and woven thicket of the honeysuckle tree.

And one day, the sky became so coated in thick, gray clouds that she could scarcely see the trees beyond her own. The world outside was fogged and unknown, and she didn't know she'd ever see it again.

"Today, you learn to fly," her mother said. But it was too early, she protested, but it was too dark, too cold. She saw no way she would make it out there, in whatever lay beyond the fog and howling wind. Barely the tiniest droplet of sunlight found its way through.

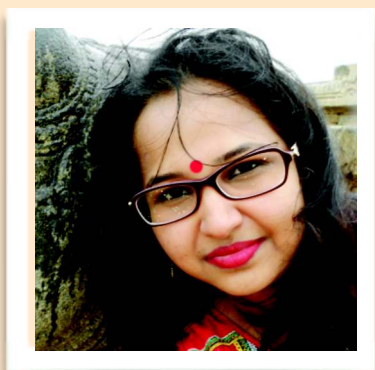
But it was there, nonetheless. So she stepped carefully – one scrawny leg, then the next – up onto the woven edge of her nest and worldly home thus

far. The wind howled by and she teetered as it threatened to tear her away. Looking up with those big, wondering eyes, she stretched and spread her silky wings, and jumped.

And she was surprised – the wind didn't toss her away, it caught her. Like a pair of soft hands it caught her and lifted her up. She let it carry her higher and higher, and suddenly she realized she could not get down! She flew, up, up, into the mass of gray clouds overhead. The wind flipped her and somersaulted her and just when she was sure she would be stuck in this gray world forever, she saw it:

A bright pink-golden glow from above, filtering down through the dark, thundering mass. She twisted her body up and flapped her wings and flew towards it, towards it. She soared up through the deepest, blackest cloud and at last burst clear through into freedom. And there, finally up there, she saw what she never had before, back on the bramble nest far below: the sunrise.





Darkness can be very overwhelming, it creeps from nowhere and then suddenly blindness takes over; there is nowhere one can turn to. Trapped in black solitude, there are no walls to hold and no light to guide. One waits for the eyes to adjust to the darkness but they fail to cooperate.

Matters supposed to work or taken for granted, does not work the way one wants and then one is left wondering that all the learning and conditioning

done got wasted at this moment.

Does one tread into the unknown? Or wait for some miracle to show up. The fear of the more terrible is looms inside and it is a risk would not wish to undertake. Looking for signs, one finds only eerie silence. At such a moment one would desire to believe that there is nothing else to do but wait, for the nothingness to come and drag you away.

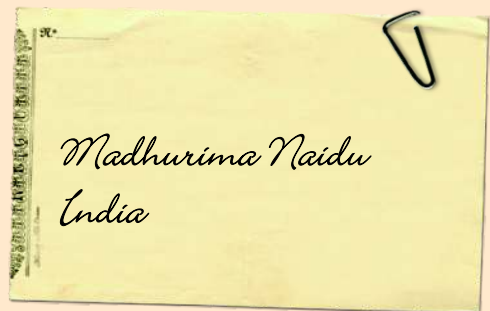
In these trying moments one takes a deep breath; those bursts of fresh air that penetrate the lungs is all one needs, and it's all that you have. It pumps freshness unexpected, and then you close your eyes and to breathe some more.

Do I want to survive this, is the question one asks; the answer is never easy, and the decision more difficult. The darkness is still cold, the journey still black. One would want to hold on to the comfortable depression, that's so warm and familiar. But taking a few moments to revel in the present, the assured and the known and then one takes the first step gingerly holding on to every inch of ground you know. There is a sharp stinging pain; you have stepped on something sharp. Quickly drawing the foot back, one stops. Telling oneself 'that's it' one understands that it is the wrong way, because the right way always has light and without light the way is not right.

At such a juncture, one does not let the momentum fail, but picking oneself again and you start walking. It's only a few steps and one realizes that there is a way, cagily taking that road and one is lost in following it. There is no light yet, but one just starts walking on a path which can build up the journey, not falling apart rotting at the same place. Now there is a

purpose and that is to walk. It does not matter where it takes, but if there is a beginning and there will be an end too. It won't come till one takes the breath, not till a step is taken, not till the pain is felt.

It is the hope that one has the strength to walk, to be able to make a way where there is none, it does not matter what we have believed in or what we had expected, the ability to move on without the need for light. Hope is not the light at the end of the tunnel it is your need to want to survive.





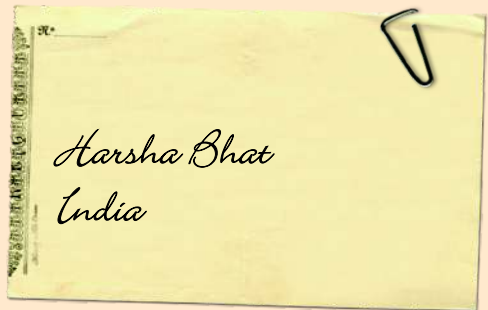
When we met it was beautiful.
I was small and so were you:
In and with each other we grew,
and hoped to see through each
other.

My first gift in life was you,
You made me realize myself.
But you left so rude,
Tore my being bare and nude.

The world now thinks I'm frail and
will fall,
But I now stand twice stronger and

tall,
For they know not how you dwell in me,
I ain't alone, now I am a 'We'.

Once my blazing sun,
You have now turned to be my silent moon.
As I sway in this maddening myth,
Your unsung symphony my soul does croon.





Messed up Hair,
An oversized grey coat,
In the mirror she looked at herself,
Not a mark of cheer.

She picked up her bag,
And walked on the crowded streets,
She stole a glance at the sky,
It looked sultry and dry.

Unnoticed she entered the college
premises,
The cacophony of the laughter
piqued her,

In vain, she opened her book,
But got lost in her own desolate world of pain.

She hoped to find similarities,
To find someone who could understand her,
Someone who noticed the imperfections of the world,
Who, like her, in this loud world, was a mute spectacle.

People unnerved her,
Parents' expectations dejected her.
She hoped to fit in the perfect shoes,
But always ended in a pair misfit.

Not oblivious to Hope,
She believed Hope could brighten her day,
But lacked the courage to face it,
What if it did not turn out the way she expected?

Finally after a good seven days,
She reached a decision after much debate.
Her disappointment had reached the hilt,
And, it was time for a change.

Ready to take a chance,
She hoped that Hope will help her,
For a better day, And a change.

And so, with hair tied up,
A grey oversized coat,
She looked at herself in the mirror,
Her Hope made her cheer.

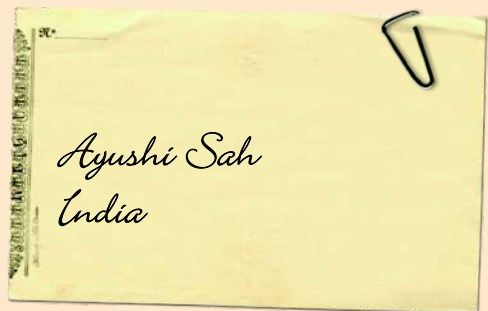
She picked up her bag,
And walked on the crowded streets,
She stole a glance at the sky,
The Sun shined bright.

Unnoticed she entered the college premises,
But, the symphony of the laughter soothed her,
With hope she opened her book,
And desired to learn a beautiful lesson.

She found similarities,
Found someone who noticed the imperfections of the world,
And, yet learnt to embrace the flaws,
With hope in heart.

People inspired her,
Parents' expectations made her perform better.
No longer hoped to fit in the perfect shoes,
Suddenly her misfit pair felt perfect.

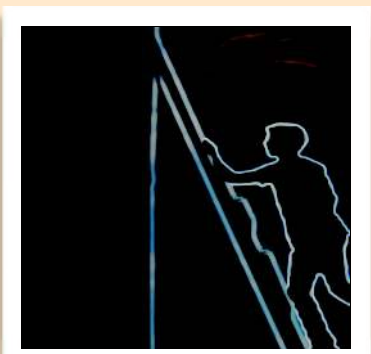
Enlivened, she felt
Like a bird with outstretched wings,
And began each day with a new beginning,
With Hope.





Hope is haste,
Nothing but a time waste,
Like a butterfly in a teak,
And a matchstick on a mountain peak,
It's the thinnest path of reality,
And the shortest form of absurdity,
Yet we dope,
All in the name of hope, hope and hope.





If you were mine
I would hold you
and whisper stories of small heroes
with big hopes
(whilst doing the shopping at Asda).

If you were mine
I would draw daydreams in
darkening clouds
place wonder in puddles -
make magic the rain
(for days when you complain that
you don't want to go outside

because it's wet).
I'd get up early and exhausted
on those 'it's still night' days off
(just to watch you sleep).

If you were mine
I would save all your milk teeth
and thread them on a necklace of endless childish chatter
(for when you enter your sullen teenage years
and feel you have nothing to say).

I would make molehills of your mountains
I would quiet your fears with listening
Then I'd wipe away hot tears
with a paintbrush dipped in gold
(and I'd stick them on the fridge like lost treasures).

If you were mine
I would hold you.





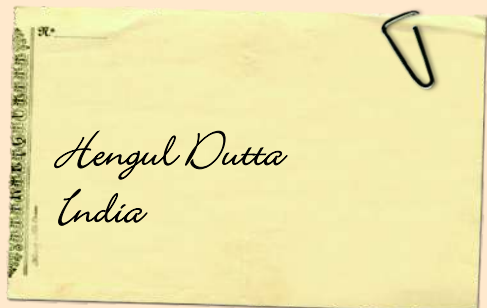
Between black Bvlgaries and a blue
bruise
she hides a smile
Only her tear stained chapstick
betrayed,
Betrayed her this one time.

He sits in a beach cottage
somewhere,
Faking it off Marley and Dylan, but
neither
But they've had history; geography
doesn't count

Geography is just another reason and he sings:

"I'm falling, flailing
I'm too stiff on words
And you're not around, I'm falling.
I'm falling."

In his den of consequences,
She traipses between razors and roses.
She trips and she falls, its my name she calls,
"Save me, I'm falling..."





In your gentle whisper, in dreams
that got woven and in stories that
got told,
The innocence of childhood, my
outstretched arms tried to hold.
Yes, the paper boat washed away but
the color of memories, will they ever
fade?
The first taste of freedom, white and
clear; the fresh smell of pain, raw
and red?

The times when you lashed out in a
torrent of utter rage,

Wiping out all that was practiced and scripted, leaving behind just the
blank page.

Insidious and relentless, you hammered away, at times, in vain,
Washing away reason and control with bleak madness and pain.

You teased and tormented stoking the ache of longing in the play of
love and hate,
Amid the stolen glances, the forced distances, and the seemingly
endless wait.

But they said run away, don't dream in the rain,
Beyond the poetry and pain, lie the everyday mundane.

Muddy shoes, endless snaking traffic and a sick child's cough,
Did you wonder why none but children found you gloomy and tough?

But I loved you best, rain, when you drenched me senseless and free,
Happy sharing you with a smile, a caress, a book and tea.

I see you today again,
The pellets of dreams, the drops of hope,

I see you today, rain,
Not your whisper, not your anger, not my happiness, not my pain,
But a second chance to relive,
My lost childhood again.





No matter what it takes,
No matter if you fall and break,
Believe in your strength,
Break the back of pain.

Don't run! Don't hide!
Just jump into the battleground and fight.
Because, you are the king of your existence,
Shackle this fear!
Forget this pain!
Clash and crash this ground
Trust me, you'll win!



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At my desk on a newsy tuesday
I look out for a glimpse of quiet
the rays of the sun give way
a surprise rain patters
dampens the window pane
raises my spirit

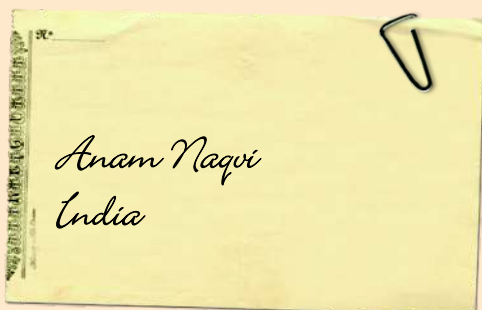
Still typing away
I want to step out
I imagine people, on the roads
some shielding themselves
some welcoming
the piercing cold drops

But I can only stare
at the window
It is now hazy
Droplets devour it in a lovers' embrace

I can feel them on me
I sit and dream
recreate memory
words hidden in the sound
of the slashing rain
Scenes travel fast
some stay

But the words stay longer
like the smell
of freshly quenched soil,
like the calm chaos
after the storm
like the brown leaves
broken, scattered about

words stay longer...
like the rain
one now with the soil
immersed deep
stay plunged
into the heart's matter





Wires...too many wires surrounded him,
Barbed, each promises to pierce through and through.
Amidst those deadly coils he stood, as the lights began to dim
Slowly and steadily, the demons in his head grew too.

Engulfed as he was, the onlookers watched on in lust
A tiny human, fighting a not so tiny battle he must.
The wind howled too, intensifying

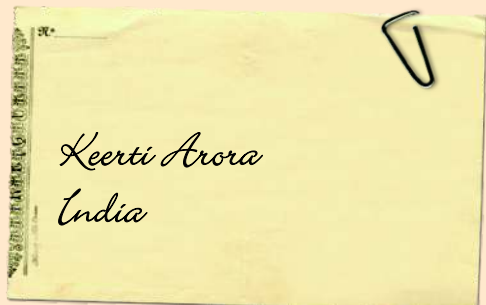
with each gust
Seducing his valor, his strength to rise, not rust.

Tick Tock, Tick Tock, his pulse echoed the passing seconds,
In anticipation of defeat, his demons began to sing,
Yet the tiny human felt a familiar tug within,
Although the battle looked lost, the tugged part in him wasn't convinced.
He focused on the tug, that didn't let him accept what others saw as his doom,
Little by little, the tiny tug began to bloom,
Silencing those demons who had thrived previously in its dearth,
With hope as his companion, the tiny human decided to start once more.

Hope was his new lens; he chose to look at his circumstances again,
Appearing similar, they, however now were free of impossibility's rein.
Besides his tiny feet, he found the tiny knot at which the coiling began,
And started uncoiling, as the onlooker's curiosity grew at the tiny engaged man.

Uncoiling he continued, until he had made an opening big enough,
The onlookers and the wind rejoiced at seeing the tiny human emerge.

A battle was won that was earlier a battle impossibly tough,
The tiny human smiled, pleased with the tiny companion tug.





Aspirations fly a thousand feet above
 my breakable heart
 But, I find that my feet are confined
 in iron chains
 Looking forward earnestly into the
 vast starless sky,
 I find my vision blurred in the
 darkness
 Desires push me forward but I realise
 that my mind is numb
 Fear of losing doth encompass me
 Tides seem to sweep over me and

waves try to lash me,
 As I ponder how to steer forward
 Because everything I have is pulling me down.

I find myself wasted, crumbled,
 withered, beaten and washed up.
 I began questioning the providence
 which created me in such a perplexed manner.

Amidst all the conundrum...to my surprise,
 I found that despite all odds I am alive.

I become conscious of a lamp burning in me,
 Giving me light to brighten my dark paths,
 Asking me to bring forth fragrance when pricked, like a rose.

With a deep understanding and
 forevision

Submitted I myself to this lamp,
 burning within me,
 to guide me forward,
 to quench my thirst, and
 to give me a shoulder to lean.

And now with full consciousness,
 I realize, this lamp has become my life.
 It was this lamp which was pushing me forward
 All through

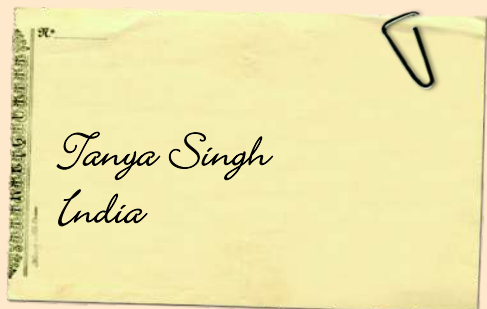
It was this lamp which urged me to break my shackles
 And to challenge life.





Let's find a treasure
Hidden somewhere between
The footprints of the car
Upon the dewy, trodden grass.
My darling, I think,
That the moon
Gives company to the delusive stars.
And on a starless night,
It gives company to its own gloom.
Those old unwashed windows,
Adorned with wry dust,
Hold a broken home.
Together perhaps,

The swirl of smoke,
From your favorite cigarette,
Held between your tired fingers
And those chapped lips.
Do you know?
You breathe in smoky sadness
And blow out delusions?
The street where we stand
The wall against where I lean
Watching you pace
Among abandonment.
You rest your head
Heavy, Oh so heavy
From the emptiness.
On my shoulders.
Your breath pausing and beginning,
Like the ticking of a clock,
On my lonely hands.
Darling, there is no treasure.
Just scars on the earth.
A waning moon,
Your favorite cigarettes,
Abandoned homes,
Dirty streets,
Walls of graffiti,
And endless minutes of hope.





the costliest possession
too fragile and evanescent
possesses the power to create
and the emptiness to destroy
paints a vivid vision
with a veiled illusion

hope, a paradox to the core
and still one wants more



Vibhor Gupta
India

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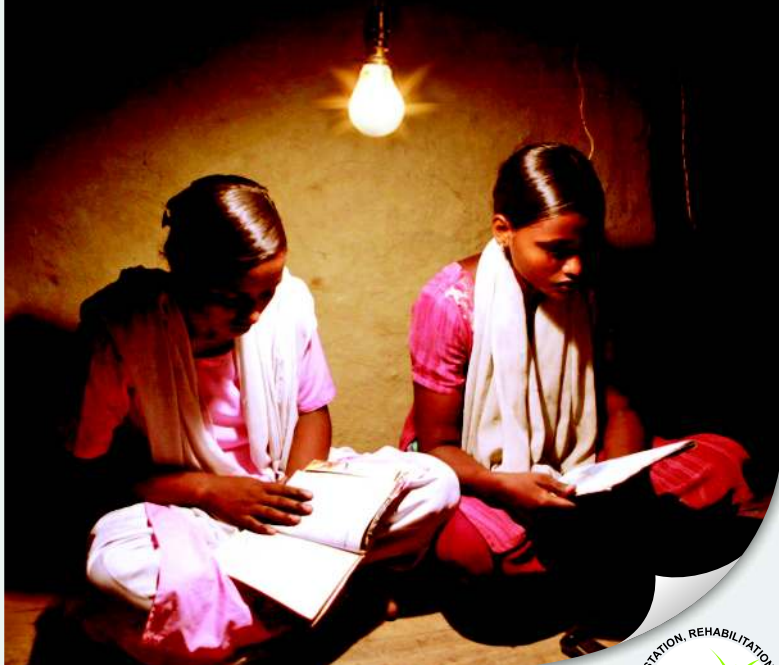


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CONCEPT



LITUMINATI

What is Lituminati ?

Lituminati is a group of individuals who believe everyone has a literary voice that needs to be given a platform to share it with the outside world.

What Lituminati does ?

In the attempt to make these voices heard the team brainstorms for a theme and leaves it to the interpretation of writers- around the world, to pen down literary pieces(poetry, fiction and non-fiction).

Why contact Lituminati ?

If you wish to contribute to Lituminati's anthologies that are released periodically

If you want to take the next step and become a part of the editorial team of Lituminati and help create anthologies

If you would like to help our initiative or become a partner

How to connect with Lituminati ?

You can write to us at lituminati@gmail.com. You can also connect with us on popular social media channels like Facebook, Google+.



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